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Disaster News

WHAT CAN FEMA PUBLIC ASSISTANCE DO FOR NEBRASKA?

GRAND ISLAND, NE – People typically think federal aid after a disaster means funds will be given directly to each resident of an impacted community. This type of direct help to individuals is approved for some disasters but not every time. The type of federal assistance available after a disaster depends on the emergency and the specific request for aid made by the state.

After the ice storms in Nebraska, a type of federal disaster assistance that often is not widely publicized was approved for 57 counties in the state. The Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) provides a type of community aid called the Public Assistance (or PA) program. This form of assistance is designed to help the entire community recover and not just individuals.

Through the PA program, FEMA assists with costs incurred to remove immediate threats to public health and safety after the disaster. Such activities include debris removal, restoration of public infrastructure, and emergency measures like search and rescue operations or increased security services. In Nebraska, FEMA will pay 75 percent of the recovery costs for those operations. State and local governments typically share the balance that FEMA does not fund.

For FEMA to know the best way to serve the Nebraska communities affected by the ice storm, local governments must apply for these federal PA grants. First the community fills out an RPA, or Request for Public Assistance, application and submits it during or after an applicant briefing. Applicant briefings are publicized meetings where FEMA and state officials explain the grant process to local officials. In Nebraska, these applicant briefings have been completed.

The applicant community is not expected to make sense of the federal grant process alone. Following the applicant briefing, Public Assistance Coordinators (PACs) from FEMA are assigned to work with applicants.

For more information about the entire Public Assistance grant application process, please see the FEMA website. <http://www.fema.gov/government/grant/pa/process.shtm>

FEMA manages federal response and recovery efforts following any national incident. FEMA also initiates mitigation activities, works with state and local emergency managers, and manages the National Flood Insurance Program. FEMA became part of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security on March 1, 2003.

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Editors: For more information on the Nebraska disaster recovery, visit www.fema.gov or <http://www.nema.ne.gov/>.